

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



Biotechnology Notes

USDA
NATHAN
1994 AUG 12 15

Volume 7 • Number 11

U.S. Department of Agriculture

November 1994

Biotechnology Notes, a compilation of agency activities, news events, and upcoming meetings, is prepared for members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Committee on Biotechnology in Agriculture (CBA) by USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB).

INSIDE USDA

ABRAC MEETS NEXT IN CALIFORNIA; PUBLIC INVITED

USDA's Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee (ABRAC) will meet November 17-18, 1994, at the Doubletree Hotel, Two Portola Plaza, Monterey, CA 93940. After the introduction of new committee members, the focus will shift to aquatic research and a report of the September 28 meeting of a working group on aquatic biotechnology and environmental safety. The public is invited to attend and to submit comments. For more details, please call USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB) at 703-235-4419; Fax: 703-235-4429.

REGISTRATION FILLED FOR BIOSAFETY SYMPOSIUM

Planners of the "Third International Symposium on the Biosafety Results of Field Tests of Genetically Modified Plants and Microorganisms" report that registration has reached its peak and is now closed. Two hundred twenty-five people from 33 countries registered for the symposium. Proceedings will be prepared and made available to the public around April 1995. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please send a request by fax after the first of the year to Daniel Jones, OAB Deputy Director (703-235-4429.)

BIOTECHNOLOGY FOR TREES

About 250 participants from 15 countries discussed state-of-the-art technology at the 1994 Second International Symposium on the Applications of Biotechnology to Tree Culture, Protection, and Utilization, October 2-6, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Sponsors included USDA/OAB, the Forest Service, and Westvaco Corporation of Summerville, SC.

Researchers talked about a few of the newer applications of science to forestry such as the use of somatic embryogenesis, genetic mapping, and gene transformation systems. Speakers explained how they use somatic embryogenesis to develop seedlings. This

technique is frequently used on tree plantations both in the United States and abroad. Progress in gene mapping and fluorescent *in vitro* hybridization were also reported on as well as the linkage between tissue culture, genetic mapping, molecular biology, and stress physiology to broader environmental and land management issues. To learn more about the symposium, please call Charles Michler, Project Leader, at the North Central Forest Experiment Station, in Rhineland, WI at 715-362-1113; Fax: 715-362-1166.

USDA SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENTS ON MODIFIED TOMATO

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is asking the public for comments on a petition submitted by DNA Plant Technology Corporation for a determination of nonregulated status for its genetically modified tomato. If approved, the Oakland, CA-based company would be able to produce its tomato line and ship it without securing further USDA permits. The tomato was modified to delay the fruit ripening process.

The public has until November 25 to send in comments. To receive a copy of the petition, please call Kay Peterson at 301-436-7601. For further information, please call Ved Malik, APHIS biotechnologist, at 301-436-6774.

GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE

USDA's National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program is now soliciting proposals. Program areas include, but are not limited to, plant genome, plant pathology, photosynthesis, soils, water protection, entomology, nematology, weed science, food research, biofuels research, animal reproduction, pest control, nitrogen fixation, markets and trade, rural development, wood, and animal growth and development. To request an application kit, please call 202-401-5048.

NEWS AROUND THE NATION (AND THE WORLD)

RAISING THE PUBLIC'S CONSCIENCE, EUROPEAN STYLE

In the article, "Towards a Public Consensus on Biotechnology," authors C. M. Miles, M. A. Winstanley, J. G. Gunning, and J. Durant explain how consensus conferences foster public understanding of biotechnology and other scientific issues.

A consensus conference includes a group of lay people who interact with a group of experts before an audience. A facilitator is also present. In preparation for the conference, the lay panel first spends two weekends being briefed on the subject under discussion. They prepare questions for the experts and based on the responses given follow up with a report representing their views. The report is read to the experts in the presence of the media and then published and made available to the Government as an input to policy. According the authors of the article, the entire process encourages public interest in science issues and often gets at the root of myths and misinformation. The article appears in the April 1994 issue of *Science in Parliament* (Vol. 51, No. 2).

TECH TRANSFER CONFERENCES

Technology Transfer Conferences Inc., a non-profit educational organization, has scheduled four conferences that will center on interactions between universities and companies. The dates are December 1-2 in Dallas, Texas; February 9-10 in Orlando, Florida; April 3-4 in San Francisco, California; and June 8-9 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For details contact Lucy Sircy at 615-366-0679; Fax: 615-366-0695.

PLANT COMMERCIALIZATION CONFERENCE NEXT YEAR

The University of Kentucky is sponsoring an international symposium on "Engineering Plants for Commercial Products/Applications," October 1-4, 1995. To be added to the conference mailing list, send your name and address to: International Symposium on Engineering Plants, c/o Conferences and Institutes, 218 Peterson Service Bldg., Lexington, KY 40506-0005. Phone: 606-257-3929; Fax: 606-323-1053; E-mail: monica.stoch@ukwang.uky.edu

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELING DISCUSSES BIOTECH

The 23rd session of the Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL) met in Ottawa, Canada, October 24-28. Thirty-three member countries of the Codex attended, as well as 13 international organizations. The goals of Codex are to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in food trade through the development of international food standards.

The following agenda items were among those scheduled for discussion: the Draft Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labeling, and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods; the use of health and nutrition claims in food product labeling; recommendations for the labeling of potential allergens; and a discussion paper on the implications of biotechnology for food labeling, which the United States volunteered to prepare as a result of discussions which took place during the 22nd session of the CCFL.

Regarding the discussion paper on biotechnology, a number of major issues were identified as areas where further elaboration and comment were sought, including the relationship between genetic engineering and conventional breeding techniques, the scientific safety evaluation of substances obtained through recombinant DNA techniques, allergenicity, the use of marker genes, and ethical considerations. Following comments from the delegations, the CCFL agreed that additional comments would be requested through a Codex circular letter. The CCFL meets again in Ottawa in 1996.

BIOREMEDIATION IS TOPIC OF U.S.-EC WORKSHOP IN BRUSSELS

The U.S.-EC Task Force on Biotechnology Research convened for the fourth time in Brussels, Belgium, October 17-19. The purpose of the Task Force is to provide a forum for representatives of U.S. government agencies which fund biotechnology research to meet with counterparts in the Commission of the European Union to exchange information and plan joint activities.

A highlight of the meeting was a joint workshop on environmental biotechnology. Based on the outcome of the workshop, the Task Force agreed to plan a major international symposium to focus on anaerobic processes, structure, and function of microbial communities involved in pollution decomposition. Proceedings of the October meeting will be published in early 1995. To obtain a copy please contact Anna Palmisano, Office of Naval Research, at 703-696-2660; Fax: 703-696-1212.

IN CASE YOU WEREN'T THERE

■ **"Biotechnology's Opportunities Beyond BST"** was the topic of a paper presented by Maryln Cordle, USDA/OAB Senior Regulatory Specialist, at the International Dairy Show, October 6, in Minneapolis, MN. She said breakthroughs in genome mapping of cows could lead to significant breeding improvements that will impact all segments of the dairy industry. She discussed numerous changes in casein and whey proteins in milk that could improve the nutritional and processing properties of cow's milk. She noted that genetically increasing lactoferrin, which is high in human milk but low in cow's milk, could help control mastitis, a disease costing U.S. dairy farmers about \$2 billion annually. Cordle predicted that biotechnology will have a positive impact on animal health management in the development of diagnostics, vaccines, and disease resistant animals. To receive a copy of Cordle's presentation, please send a request by fax to 703-235-4429.

■ **Advances made in mapping the human genome** could benefit those scientists working in agriculture, especially in the area of complex traits, according to some scientists who attended the conference "Human Genome 1994: The Genes and Beyond", October 2-5 in Washington, DC. Participants reviewed new information on genes involved in signal transduction and development as well as the ethical issues that must be faced. Speakers also noted the progress being made on certain non-human genomes such as yeast, the fruit fly, and nematodes.

■ **The Sixth Annual Biotechnology and the Food Supply Workshop**, sponsored by Public Voice for Food and Health Policy in cooperation with FDA and USDA, was held October 13 in Washington, DC. Some common themes that ran throughout the program include the difficulty of labeling biotech food products, institutional credibility, commercialization, and information dissemination. In addressing regulatory issues, Terry Medley, APHIS Acting Associate Administrator, said the 1986 framework has been useful but it is not a complete commercialization roadmap. He said "safe, transparent, and comprehensive policies are needed which will facilitate trade and the safe transfer of the technology."

Jim Maryanski, FDA agency official, said the labeling issue continues to evoke a lot of discussion. FDA is thinking about what kind of scientific review is appropriate for biotech-produced foods. He said food safety assessment is critical and that FDA is continuing to work with the World Health Organization and the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development to further refine principles for safety assessment. For more information about the workshop, please call Mark Epstein, Public Voice Executive Director, at 202-371-1840.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

■ **World Food Chemical News.** A new weekly journal published by CRC Press, Washington, DC. To subscribe please call 202-544-1980; Fax: 202-546-3890.

■ **"The Evolution and Development of Biotechnology: A Revolutionary Force in American Agriculture."** By Joel Schor, USDA/ERS historian. Published by USDA, August 1994. To receive a copy, call 202-501-8322.

■ **The Uses of Life: A History of Biotechnology.** By Robert Bud. Cambridge University Press, 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211. 1993.

■ **"Cycling Back to Nature with Biodegradable Polymers."** This sourcebook is intended for ages 10 and up and is designed to stimulate a sense of environmental awareness. It was produced by the National 4-H Council in cooperation with USDA's Cooperative State Research Service and other groups. To receive a copy, call the National 4-H Council in Chevy Chase, MD. at 301-961-2800.

- "Technology Transfer: Working for Collaboration, Commerce, and Competitiveness." This is a new report of the North Carolina Biotechnology Center's Advisory Committee on Development and Transfer of Biotechnology. September 1994. To request a copy, please call 919-541-9366; Fax: 919-990-9544.

- **Probe.** A newsletter for the USDA Plant Genome Research Program. Volume 4, No. 1/2. July 1993-July 1994. To receive a copy, please Susan McCarthy, Managing Editor, at 301-504-6613; Fax: 301-504-7098.

- "Holland Biotechnology: In Preparation for the Future." Published by Two Rivers B.V., Ir. Lelyweg 50 b, 2031 CD Haarlem, Holland. 1994.

- "Biotechnology (1992-1994): Catalogue of Contracts with Project Descriptions." Edited by C. Martinez. Published by the European Commission, Directorate-General XII. To order a copy, please write to Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L-2985 Luxembourg.

- "Proceedings of the International Workshop on Animal Biotechnology Issues." Prepared by the University of California, Davis. April 1994. To receive a copy, please send a fax request to either 703-235-4429 or 916-752-0175.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Nov. 13-16: "The Third International Symposium on the Biosafety Results of Field Tests of Genetically Modified Plants and Microorganisms." Monterey, CA. Sponsored by U.S. and international organizations. For more details, please call Maryln Cordle at 703-235-4419; Fax: 703-235-4429.

Nov. 15-18: "Ninth Crucifer Genetics Workshop-ISHS Symposium on Brassicas, Instituto." Lisbon, Portugal. Contact the Instituto Superior do Agronomia. Fax: 351-1-363-5031.

Nov. 21-22: "Biotechnology in European Society." The Hague, The Netherlands. Write to David Bennett, Secretary, Task Group on Public Perceptions of Biotechnology. Cambridge Biomedical Consultants, Schuytstraat 12, 2517 XE Den Haag, The Netherlands.

Nov. 21-24: Brighton Crop Protection Conference: Pests and Diseases. Brighton, UK. Write to Conference Associates and Services Ltd., 55 New Cavendish St., London W1M 7RE, UK.

Dec. 5-7: "Expo '94. Kansas City, MO. The focus is on bio-based products. Sponsored by USDA, Department of Energy, Department of Defense, and the New Uses Council. For more details, please contact Barbara Detwiler at 703-734-4081; Fax: 703-356-4056.

Dec. 14-17: Plant Molecular Biology and Biotechnology International Symposium. New Delhi, India. Write to G. Chatterjee, ICGEB, NII Campus, Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi 110067, India; or call 91-11-6867356; Fax: 91-11-6862316.

1995

Jan 7-13: Plant Cell Biology: Mechanisms, Molecular Machinery, Signals and Pathways. Taos, NM. Sponsored by Keystone Symposium. Call 303-262-1230; Fax: 303-262-1525.

Jan. 9-12: "BioEast '95" Washington, DC. Organized by BioConferences International Inc. For details, please call 301-652-3072; Fax: 301-652-4951.

Jan. 15-19: "Plant Genome III. The International Conference on the Status of Plant Genome Research." San Diego, CA. Contact Scherago International Inc., 11 Penn Plaza, Suite 1003, New York, NY 10001. Tel: 212-643-1750; Fax: 212-643-1758.

Jan. 25-27: Third Annual Pacific Northwest Biotechnology Exposition. Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Hosted by the British Columbia Biotechnology Alliance. For details, please call Cheryl Johnson at 604-244-9378; Fax: 604-463-3426.

Feb. 5-10: "Chemical/Biological Synergies to Reduce Inputs for Pest Control." Oxnard, CA. Co-chaired by Monsanto Company and the Weizmann Institute of Science. For registration information contact David Fischhoff, Monsanto Company, 700 Chesterfield Pkwy North, St. Louis, MO 63198 (e-mail: dafisc@ccmail.monsanto.com); or send a fax to: 314-537-6047.

March 17-23: Toward the Genetic Manipulation of Insects. Tamaron, CO. Call 303-262-1230; Fax: 303-262-1525.

NOTES

Biotechnology Notes is written by Marti Asner, public affairs specialist in USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology. Any comments or suggestions may be sent to USDA/OAB, Room 1001, Rosslyn Plaza-E, 14th and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250-2200. Telephone: 703-235-4419; Fax: 703-235-4429; e-mail: masner@csrs.esusda.gov. This news publication is also accessible on Internet via Gopher.

USDA prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at 202-720-5881 (voice) or 202-720-7808 (TDD).

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, USDA, Washington, DC 20250 or call 202-720-7327 (voice) or 202-720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.